

VZCZCXRO0277  
OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHAK #6617/01 3421326  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 081326Z DEC 06  
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0239  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 0866  
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0823  
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 0497  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0358  
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 1611  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0101

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006617

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/07/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [IZ](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH PM ERDOGAN'S VISIT TO DAMASCUS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROSS WILSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) Summary: Lebanon was the main focus on Turkish PM Erdogan's visit to Damascus, PM/FM foreign affairs advisor Ahmet Davutoglu told Ambassador December 8. Erdogan urged President Asad to make Syria a force for stability in a polarizing region, and to do so by using its influence to dissuade Hezbollah from destabilizing actions in Lebanon. Asad made good general noises, but appears to have been unresponsive on specifics. Davutoglu believed that Asad is more inclined to be helpful on Iraq, and he said Asad reiterated in predictable terms Syria's interest in dialogue with the US. Erdogan also conveyed to Asad Israeli views on Israeli-Syrian dialogue. End Summary.

12. (C) Davutoglu characterized Erdogan's December 6 meeting with Asad as frank. Erdogan expressed Turkey's concerns regarding Iraq and Lebanon. He said that Turkey does not want to see polarization in the region because it could lead to wider conflict. Turkey regards the attitude of Syria as very important in this regard; it would like to see Syria acting to prevent the polarizations already reflected in Iraq and Lebanon from spreading further throughout the region. Turkey is particularly concerned about sectarian division - i.e., widening Shia/Sunni violence. Asad allegedly said Syria sees the same problems and is against sectarian divisions. It is particularly concerned about Iraq. Asad emphasized the importance Syria attaches to Iraqi unity and territorial integrity and to intensifying national reconciliation and integration among communities there.

13. (C) Erdogan reportedly bemoaned the current crisis in Lebanon and said that Turkey wants it to be dealt with in a political manner, as opposed to through street demonstrations and violence. Of course, people have a right to demonstrate, but the opposition to Siniora should not provoke the government or inflame the situation. Syria, he told Asad, should use its "convincing power" with the Shia community and especially Hezbollah to calm the situation and work via political channels within the Lebanese system, rather than through violence and street demonstrations. Erdogan relayed to Asad elements of detailed briefings he and Davutoglu had received earlier in the week from PM Siniora and his political advisor Mohammed Chattah on what Davutoglu called alternative formulas for power sharing in Lebanon as well as on issues related to the international tribunal. Davutoglu told Ambassador that the intent was not to mediate between Beirut and Damascus. He implied that these ideas were conveyed per Siniora's request.

14. (C) Asad claimed to be unaware of the latest proposals from Siniora about Lebanon's alternatives. He would assess

what Erdogan said. He said Syria shares concerns about Lebanon not being dominated by sectarian divisions. He agreed the opposition should be careful and claimed Syria is trying to encourage restraint. As evidence of this effort's effectiveness, he pointed to the mild reaction among Lebanese Shia to the death of a Shia demonstrator earlier in the week.

But the Lebanese Christians are problems, too. Asad complained that Michel Aoun has the support of large numbers, but is kept out of government. Lebanon's internal arrangements should be fair to all factions and elements of society and ensure them adequate safeguards. Regarding the international tribunal, Asad said no one opposes it, but its principles need to be specified to avoid unnecessary activity in areas not relevant to its functions. He said Syria would like to work with Turkey. Erdogan was apparently non-committal.

¶5. (C) Davutoglu advised that Israeli PM Olmert had sent a message to PM Erdogan recently asking that Erdogan convey Israeli views on bilateral relations to Asad. Erdogan did so, and Asad gave an "encouraging" response. There could be, according to Davutoglu, positive developments arising from this, but he declined to elaborate. In a separate conversation, the Israeli ambassador to Turkey advised Ambassador that a recent visitor from Jerusalem met with Davutoglu and asked if the Turks would convey Israel's view that if the Syrians mean what they say about wanting to talk, they should look first at their support for Meashal, Hamas and Hezbollah and try to be helpful on Cpl. Shalit. The Israeli ambassador said he will see Davutoglu in coming days to get more detail on this exchange and will advise.

¶6. (C) On Iraq, Erdogan reportedly highlighted Turkey's concerns about recent trends. He said Turkey's principal

ANKARA 00006617 002 OF 002

concern is ensuring the unity and territorial integrity of the country. Increasing polarization, especially worsening violence between the Shia and Sunni communities, must be reversed. Erdogan commended the re-establishment of Syria-Iraqi relations and encouraged more Syrian work to reach out to and support the Maliki government. Asad said this would continue. A Syrian embassy will open soon. Syria supports the Neighbors of Iraq process that has been launched. It is ready to support further work in this forum and any others that will be helpful. Davutoglu opined to Ambassador that what Asad said on Iraq was different and more supportive in tone than what Erdogan heard in Tehran December ¶3. This suggested to him that it is incorrect to regard Syria as completely under Iranian domination. He acknowledged that there is more Syrian-Iranian symmetry on Lebanon and that it is not always helpful.

¶7. (C) Regarding the United States, Asad suggested that Syria is prepared to be flexible. He told Erdogan that when FM Gul visited Damascus in September, he had urged Asad to make some gestures, talk about peace, etc. Asad claimed he'd done this and cited some interviews. Asad told Erdogan that there could be other positive gestures by Syria to the US, and he hoped there would be gestures in the other direction. He is "ready for any openings and to discuss anything with the US."

¶8. (C) Comment: This Erdogan diplomacy appears motivated partly by concern that Turkey keep up with Syrian and Iranian initiatives at a time when (including post-Iraq Study Group report) Ankara sees things shifting in uncertain ways. Another motivator is to be, or at least look, helpful on Middle East/regional concerns at a time when Turkey is approaching the end game of its latest crisis over EU accession. Erdogan reportedly will visit Beirut in coming days. End Comment.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON